

# Reconsidering the Sacrifice of Guru Arjan

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Guru Arjan's martyrdom (1606) marks a critical development in the crystallization of the Sikh tradition. For centuries Sikhs have been commemorating the Guru's phenomenal sacrifice with the drink of milk and water: its coolness not only counteracts the blazing sands with which Guru Arjan was tortured, but is also a reminder of the Guru's supreme serenity and calm. In 2006 I published my Oxford monograph, *Life and Work of Guru Arjan: History, Memory and Biography in the Sikh Tradition*<sup>1</sup> in honor of its 400th anniversary. Over the years scholarly misunderstandings and misrepresentations have generated a belligerence that clouds the historic event of Guru Arjan's martyrdom. This article engages with the work of prominent scholars such as W.H. McLeod and Louis E. Fenech.

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The special issue of the *Journal of Punjab Studies* (Spring-Fall 2010: Vol. 17, Nos. 1 & 2) was dedicated to an appraisal of scholarly contributions of the late W.H. McLeod. Building on his brief remark that "Gurū Arjan, the fifth Gurū and father of Guru Hargobind, had in some manner incurred the displeasure of the Mughal authorities and in 1606 had died while in custody,"<sup>2</sup> Louis E. Fenech examined the notion of 'martyrdom' in the Sikh tradition and engaged with the arguments presented in my book on the life and teachings of Guru Arjan. I appreciate his effort to revisit the discussion on the issue of how early Sikh community understood Guru Arjan's death at the hands of Mughal authorities. Here, I do not want to repeat my comprehensive treatment of the available sources on Guru Arjan's martyrdom, presented in the eighth chapter of my book, which is the focus of Fenech's arguments in his essay "Martyrdom: W.H. McLeod and his Students" (JPS 17: 1&2, pp. 75-93). Instead, I offer my response to his usage and interpretation of the available data, by following a genealogical mode of reading that employs multiple voices to relativize all the voices so that no single voice becomes dominant.

In his analysis of my arguments Fenech begins as follows: "Perhaps the most important, sustained, and serious assessment of my and McLeod's analysis of contemporary sources is that of Pashaura Singh (another of McLeod's students) which appears in his very important book

on Guru Arjan” (pp. 78-9). He ends his analysis with his view: “Important as Pashaura’s claims may be therefore *these do not really go beyond McLeod’s brief sentence* and thus his analysis fails to critically advance our understanding of the event of the Guru’s death. It rounds out the narrative innovatively to be sure, but forwards it little” (p. 81, emphasis added). Elsewhere, Fenech claims: “What one can say definitively about Guru Arjan’s death is very little. The only conclusion the evidence will support is that Guru Arjan earned the enmity of the Mughal state by appearing to support the rival claim of Khusrau, was imprisoned (and perhaps beaten) by the emperor’s minions, and subsequently died in Mughal custody in Lahore. *McLeod’s caution in accepting the claims of tradition is firmly based*” (emphasis added).<sup>3</sup> True to his apologetic stance, Fenech resists going beyond McLeod’s dated opinion and cannot accept any advance on the subject no matter how innovatively the competing voices may try. This is his scholarly prerogative, and one must appreciate his position even though one may not agree with his reductionist approach. It is, however, instructive to note that after reading my arguments McLeod had changed his earlier stance on Guru Arjan’s martyrdom and accepted that the Guru “was cruelly executed while being held by the Mughal authorities in Lahore.”<sup>4</sup> This remark reflected his open attitude towards any alternative reading of an historical event.

Let us closely look at how Fenech uses some contemporary and near-contemporary sources in his analysis. To take issue with the argument that Jahangir applied Mongol tribal law of Yasa to put Guru Arjan to death by torture, Fenech questions my interpretation “as it hinges in large part upon the speculation that Jahangir would have understood Guru Arjan to be either royal, honored or spiritual” (p. 80). Fenech exaggerates certain Persian phrases from the *Jahangirnama* to argue that Guru Arjan was not an acknowledged ‘spiritual’ leader: “...Guru Arjan, according to Jahangir, was not a genuine spiritual guide, but rather a pretender to the status who merely dressed the part, *dar libās-i pīrī o shaikhī* ‘in the garments of spirituality and holiness’. Guru Arjan’s teachings were, Jahangir continues, the ‘false trade’ (*dokān-i bātil*) of an ‘inconsequential little fellow’ (*mardak-i majhūl*) whose falseness Jahangir himself had realised when the Guru applied the *qashqah* to the seditious Khusrau’s forehead” (p. 80). In the process of over-interpretation Fenech fails to recognize that Jahangir used these phrases due to his despicable temperament. Anyone who has read his memoirs carefully would know that this was Jahangir’s trademark to castigate popular spiritual leaders. For instance, Jahangir himself writes in his memoirs: “Shaykh Nizam Thanesari, one of the imposters of the age, [23a] met Khusraw, encouraged him with good news, and escorted him a while along the way. He came to see me. When I heard the news, I

gave him his expenses for the road and ordered him to make a pilgrimage to Mecca.”<sup>5</sup> This statement exposes the double standards of justice applied by the autocratic ruler for an alleged similar crime. The Sikh Guru was given capital punishment according to the Mongol tribal law (Yasa), while a Muslim Shaikh was exiled and sent to Mecca apparently on the basis of the *Sharia* law. Fenech deliberately ignores this example because it contradicts the thrust of exaggeration in his arguments.

Moreover, Jahangir’s predisposition against another spiritual leader of his times may be seen in the following entry in his memoirs: “I received the news that an Afghan named Shaykh Ibrahim had started peddling his wares as a spiritual guide in a pargana in the vicinity of Lahore. As is the custom of hoi polloi and the vile, a multitude of Afghans and others had gathered around him. I ordered him summoned and entrusted to Parvez to be held in the Chunar fortress until the affair died down.”<sup>6</sup> The most troublesome issue for Jahangir was the conversion of “some ignorant, stupid Muslims” to Sikh fold. This was the trend that Naqshbandi revivalists and Islamic clerics attributed to Emperor Akbar’s heterodoxy and demanded from the new emperor a stop on it in lieu of their pledge of support to him at the time of his accession to the Mughal throne. Jahangir’s intentions were quite explicit when he wrote that the alternative for death penalty was to bring him [Guru Arjan] “into the embrace of Islam.” This statement itself signaled a change in the religious policy of Jahangir who presented himself as the ‘defender of Islam’. Therefore, the religious dimension cannot be overlooked completely in any serious analysis since it plays a crucial role in power relationships. Even a cursory understanding of current affairs can reveal how the variable of ‘religion’ functions in contemporary ‘politics’ in various countries throughout the world. Again, Fenech does not even mention that Jahangir had offered to Guru Arjan an alternative for death penalty to embrace Islam. Why would he make that offer if he did not consider him a spiritual leader (even in a pretended sense)? Guru Arjan’s refusal to embrace Islam certainly made his death a ‘sacrifice’ for the defense of his faith. This is what his contemporary Bhai Gurdas described in his *Var* (24:23).<sup>7</sup>

Fenech brings in discussion the issue of ‘respectful manner’ of Guru Arjan’s death in contrast to the way in which “some of Khusrau’s sympathizers were treated in a very harsh manner, paraded around in the skin of an ass before the captured prince’s very eyes, torture which Jahangir cheerfully describes (something he does not do in Guru Arjan’s execution)”: “Would the emperor therefore advise his subordinates in Lahore to take such care in carrying out Guru Arjan’s death sentence, *the guru of a group which was to say the least an exceedingly marginal presence in Mughal sources*, to ensure that he was killed in what we can only assume to be a relatively respectful manner (torturous, yes, but

respectful nevertheless)?" (p. 80, emphasis added). Rather than decoding the historical context behind this whole episode, Fenech simplistically says: "In the light of emperor's memoirs I think this unlikely despite the use of the specific terms *siyasat o yasa*" (p. 80). He pointlessly questions the translation of these terms (*siyasat o yasa*, 'put to death with tortures') offered by Ganda Singh who was duly trained in Persian language. Here, I follow Shireen Moosavi's translation of the Persian phrase. Literally, *yasa* is the Mongol term for 'law' and *siyasat* means 'punishment', signifying the phrase as 'punishment under law'. In Mughal times both words were used for capital punishment. Under the Yasa of Mongol warlord Genghis Khan (/Chingiz Khan), the blood of princes and honored persons was not spilled. Only those means of killing were employed for them that would prevent this happening.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the punishment of extreme tortures was inflicted without shedding the blood of Guru Arjan who was a religious leader even in Jahangir's eyes.

In his influential work, *Discipline and Punish*, Michael Foucault provides us with a model of punishment as public-ritual in seventeenth-century France, explaining the dynamics of power in pre-modern societies. The punishment had its logic or rationale. Power belonged to the king, and when one of the king's subjects acted against him, the infamy of his crime had to be 'written', so to speak, on his body through torture. Punishment, in this way, was a way of signaling to—or, actually, performing for—the people both the nature of power of the king and the consequences of opposing it.<sup>9</sup> However, Foucault's model of punishment has already come under criticism that it "does not address the kind of *agon* [struggle; contest] one finds in the accounts of religious suffering."<sup>10</sup> In the case of Guru Arjan's tortures, Foucault's model cannot be applied completely because his execution was not a public spectacle. In fact, the Mughal authorities themselves felt 'powerless' in 'fearing' public backlash because of his high spiritual reputation. Even Jahangir left Lahore after passing the order for capital punishment. In actual practice, it was Shaykh Farid Bukhari (Murtaza Khan) who carried out Jahangir's orders. It should, however, be kept in mind that no one dies a natural death in state custody. The Guru was tortured according to the Mongol law (*yasa siyasat*) while he was in Mughal custody for about a week (May 24-30, 1606).<sup>11</sup> During this period, what happened to the Guru can be reconstructed only by an analysis of the Mongol tribal practices followed by the Mughal authorities. I will have more on 'respectful manner' of death in a future study.

Using some literal translations of Persian terms and phrases of *Jahangirnama*, Fenech suggests that Thackston's translation is more accurate than the one provided by Ganda Singh and embraced by many Sikhs. Although I myself have followed Thackston's translation in my analysis (because his English is more accessible at this point in time), I

want to provide one typical example to show that sometimes translation fails to capture the original sense of the Persian language used in early seventeenth century. For instance, Thackston has translated the Persian phrase *gaul-parastan* as ‘fools’ whereas Shireen Moosvi translates it as ‘dervish-garbed worshippers’, referring to Sufis in general (“...They called him guru. Many fools [/dervish-garbed worshippers] from all around had recourse to him and believed in him implicitly”<sup>12</sup>). This meaning has significant implications in the present context of Guru Arjan’s reputation among the Sufis. Not surprisingly, Prince Khusrau went to Guru Arjan for his blessings because he knew that the Guru enjoyed a high spiritual reputation among the Sufis and Muslim dervishes who supported his liberal ideas. He also knew how his grandfather, Emperor Akbar, held the Guru in high esteem.

In his arguments Fenech passionately follows the imperial perspective and fails to see the reality from the perspective of subaltern or marginal groups. For instance, he writes: “The son of Akbar, it seems, has been much vilified in Sikh hagiography, for contemporary Persian accounts note (with some exaggeration perhaps) that Jahangir was an emperor known particularly for his just dealings with all the members of his vast empire.”<sup>13</sup> This is highly misleading statement. If one examines early Sikh sources, particularly the *Mahima Prakash*, one is startled to find a positive image of Jahangir in these chronicles. By contrast, a close look at the *Jahangirnama* reveals an account of important events, particularly of the early years of Jahangir’s reign, and a candid view of his personal life, replete with his vices and virtues. Bonnie Wade, for instance, remarks that from his memoirs we gain a personal sense of Jahangir and his times: “He was a complex character, full of contradictions, a mixture of bad temper and genial temperament, one who had disregard for human misery yet acutely sensitive to art and nature, a lover of sport as well as entertainment. He was callous and cruel, yet garrulous and erudite.”<sup>14</sup> Thus any representation of Jahangir in essentialist terms such as ‘his just dealings with all the members of his vast empire’ is completely off the mark. One can question his sense of justice for not giving capital punishment to his rebellious son Khusrau who was the main culprit in the whole saga.

Adopting a dismissive approach towards contemporary traces of historical evidence Fenech comments on ‘the infamous letter’ of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624), using Indu Banga’s recent take on the passage in question dealing with Guru Arjan as “a digression (a somewhat more lengthy aside than she gives credit, mind you) in an advocacy of the glory of Sirhindi’s particular variety of Islam” (p. 81). He continues:

Indeed, the simple fact that Sirhindi phrases the event in the passive voice in Persian (*khushtan-i kāfir-i lain-i goindwāl bisyār khūb wāqi shud*, ‘the execution of the accursed kafir of Goindwal very fortunately happened’) and thus not in the jubilant tone which either Ganda Singh or Pashaura Singh note, supports this claim. Yet even Indu Banga fails to note that the emphasis on Sirhindi falls into the same precarious trap into which scholars have been falling since the late nineteenth century, namely the failure to recognise that both the Naqshbandi order’s and Sirhindi’s significance is a product of later Indian historiography, in particular that of the Naqshbandiyya silsilah itself, something to which Pashaura Singh himself points. (p. 81)

In my early study I have addressed Fenech’s ‘technical arguments’ in detail. I would like to reiterate my position by citing the complete passage of Sirhindi’s letter specifically relating to Guru Arjan and its analysis in the wider historical context of what was happening in Mughal India at that crucial period. I am reproducing the relevant discussion below from my book on Guru Arjan:

There is a contemporary reference to Guru Arjan’s execution in 1606 in the *Maktubat-i Rabbani* of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, leader of the Naqshbandi movement in the Punjab in the early seventeenth century.<sup>15</sup> He rejoiced at the news of this execution, providing the hard evidence about the historical situation in which Muslim revivalists celebrated the Guru’s death in Mughal custody. In a personal letter to Shaykh Farid Bukhari (Murtaza Khan), the most influential Mughal official of Jahangir and the persecutor of Guru Arjan, he wrote:

These days the accursed infidel of Gobindwal was very fortunately killed. It is a cause of great defeat for the reprobate Hindus. With whatever intention and purpose they are killed – the humiliation of infidels is for Muslims life itself.<sup>16</sup>

In a jubilant tone Sirhindi refers to Guru Arjan as the ‘accursed infidel of Gobindwal’ (*kafir-i la`in gobind wal*) whose ‘execution...very fortunately happened’ (*kushtan ...bisyar khub waqi` shud*). This direct reference has convinced Sikh scholars that Sirhindi’s hand was evident in Jahangir’s decision to imprison and subsequently execute Guru Arjan. Recently, Louis Fenech has questioned this conclusion on two grounds: first, the Shaikh’s infamous letter was not sent to Jahangir himself, but to

the Governor of Punjab, Shaykh Farid Bukhari (Murtaza Khan); and second, Sirhindi wrote this letter well after the fact. On the basis of these two arguments Fenech concludes that the Shaikh's role in the Guru's execution is conjectural.<sup>17</sup> These technical arguments aside, no one can deny Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi's intimate relationship with Shaykh Farid Bukhari, the principal actor in Guru Arjan's execution and the main supporter of the Islamic revivalist movement.

Most instructively, there is a crucial entry in the *Jahangirnama* (folio 27b) before the order of Guru Arjan's execution, describing Jahangir's monetary grant to a group of Naqshbandi dervishes: "Since Shaykh Husayn Jami had dreams about me that came true shortly afterward. I awarded him twenty lacs of dams, which would be thirty-five to forty thousand rupees, for his own expenses and for the khanqah and the dervishes who were with him."<sup>18</sup> No scholar has thus far tried to unmask the mystery behind the actual context of this entry. Shaykh Husayn Jami, a peerless member of the Naqshbandi order, used to write encouraging letters to the then Prince Salim (Jahangir): "I have seen His Holiness Khawaja Baha'uddin in a dream, and he said, 'Soon Sultan Salim will mount the throne, causing the world to flourish in justice and equity and giving the grief-stricken cause for rejoicing with his generosity and liberality'."<sup>19</sup> The original name of Khawaja Baha'uddin was Baha'uddin Naqshband (1317-1389), the eponymous founder of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, which was highly influential in Timurid Iran and Central Asia. I have discussed the historical significance of this entry in my examination of the religious dimension of Guru Arjan's execution in my book. Here, it is crucial to note that Shaykh Husayn Jami was accompanied, according to Jahangir, by a number of "dervishes who were with him" when he was honored by the emperor in Lahore. It is highly likely that Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi was one of them. Most probably, this was the occasion when complaints against Guru Arjan were made to the emperor about his alleged blessings to Prince Khusrau. Otherwise, why would Sirhindi express his jubilation at the Guru's execution later on? He was self-reflexively expressing his ecstasy at the mission accomplished. There is an urgent need to have a deeper understanding of the strategy of using the motif of a dream in the Naqshbandi letters addressed to Mughal authorities, including Emperor Jahangir.

In his major study Yohanan Friedmann has pointed out Jahangir's ambivalent relationship with Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi from the fact that the emperor imprisoned Sirhindi in the fort of Gwalior in 1619 so that his "disturbed disposition and confused mind would calm down a little."<sup>20</sup> This happened only when Sirhindi incurred the displeasure of Jahangir for his unbending opposition to the Shi'a who were powerful at court. Later on Sirhindi was restored to favor before his death in 1624. Friedmann compellingly argues that much of the material surrounding

Sirhindi and his popularity exists because of his devout followers, those directly under his mastership, rather than the Mughal courtiers to whom he occasionally wrote. He further claims that Jahangir's personal religious predilections did not determine his state policies. In any serious analysis, however, one must keep the historical context in mind because human behavior is indeed contextual and contingent. At the beginning of his reign Jahangir's political situation was quite unstable. His own son provided him the greatest challenge. At that time he was bound to listen to radical voices of Muslim revivalists that offered him unflinching support. Once he established himself firmly on the Mughal throne he could be magnanimous even with his opponents and project himself as a liberal emperor like his father. People's attitudes change with the change in historical circumstances. Our main concern here is related to the circumstances that led to Guru Arjan's execution in Mughal custody at Jahangir's orders.

Notably, a significant number of Sirhindi's letters were addressed to a Mughal grandee, Shaykh Farid Bukhari, who had earlier distinguished himself in warfare against the Afghans in Orissa when he was promoted to the command of 1500 horses during the reign of Emperor Akbar. Akbar had also conferred upon him the grand title of the "master of the pen and the sword" (*sahib-us-saif-w-al-qalm*).<sup>21</sup> When Jahangir was ascending to the imperial throne after Akbar's death in 1605, it was Shaykh Farid Bukhari who was responsible for extracting a solemn oath from the new Emperor to defend Islam. In this context, the testimony of Father Pierre Du Jarric in his book *Akbar and the Jesuits* is quite revealing:

Accordingly, the leading noble, Sheikh Farid Bukhari, having been sent by the others as their representative came to the Prince (Salim, entitled Jahangir), and promised in their names to place the Kingdom (of India) in his hands provided that he would swear to defend the law of Mohammad.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, Shaykh Farid Bukhari rendered conspicuous services in the capture and liquidation of Prince Khusrau and thus earned the title of *Murtaza Khan* ("lord agreeable"), eventually increasing his rank to the command of 6, 000 horses.<sup>23</sup> It was this Murtaza Khan to whom Jahangir handed over Guru Arjan to be capitally punished according to Mongol tribal law.

Immediately after Guru Arjan's execution, Sirhindi expressed his exultancy in a letter that he wrote to Shaykh Farid Bukhari for the mission accomplished. The first lines of this letter have already been identified. The remaining part reads as follows:



Before this *Kafir* [“infidel”] was killed, I had seen in a dream that the Emperor of the day had destroyed the crown of the head of *Shirk* or infidelity. It is true that this infidel was the chief of the infidels and a leader of the Kafirs...The object of levying *Jeziya* [“capitation tax on non-Muslims”] on them is to humiliate and insult the *Kafirs*, and *jihad* [“religious war”] against them and hostility towards them are the necessities of the Mohammedan faith.<sup>24</sup>

The common motif of a ‘dream’ in the letters of the two Naqshbandi stalwarts, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and Shaykh Husayn Jami, is quite striking. This was part of their strategy to convince the Mughal authorities receiving their letters about the urgency of their agenda. Here, Sirhindi made no secret of his hatred against Guru Arjan when he declared him as the ‘chief of the people of heinous sin’ (*reis-ahl-i-shirk*) and ‘an infidel-leader of the people of infidelity’ (*kafir-imam-i-ahl-i-kufr*). From these intensely spiteful phrases one can easily capture the sense of venom in Sirhindi’s raving and ranting. He considered the growing influence of the Guru as the main obstacle in the success of his own revivalist agenda in the Punjab. His strong prejudice against non-Muslim Indians is quite evident from this letter in which he advocated their ‘humiliation and destruction’ as the ‘necessities of the Mohammedan faith’ (*jihad bil-kuffar wa ghilzat bar ishan az zaruriyat-i-din ast*). In view of this overwhelming evidence no serious scholar can afford to ignore the interaction of parallel religious movements at that particular stage in Indian history.<sup>25</sup>

Some Indian historians intentionally play down the contents of the relevant passage from Sirhindi’s letter as an ‘aside’ to promote their hidden agenda. In her critique of my arguments, for instance, Indu Banga argues that four lines related to Guru Arjan’s death do not constitute the ‘first lines’ but occur in the middle of a long letter, in which “Sirhindi is referring to this news in passing (*darin hal*) and expressing his satisfaction over the happening ‘in whichever way it might have been brought about’!”<sup>26</sup> She further argues that “there is no indication in the letter that Sirhindi had been instrumental in bringing about the death of Guru Arjan.”<sup>27</sup> Two comments are in order here. First, we should always keep in mind that within a text no part is less privileged than the other parts. All must receive the same quality and manner of attention. Conventionally, much of a text can be processed into coherence, though some, if after careful interpretive effort it resists this treatment, may be left alone, or dealt with in a different way. In order to seek a balanced perspective, however, we must take cognizance of those texts which do

not fall into coherence. For instance, the reference to Guru Arjan's death in Sirhindi's letter resists the 'meaning' that Indu Banga is trying to convey in her strained arguments. Second, we must use caution that in establishing coherence we reduce the text to codes implanted in our minds by the arbitrary fiat of a culture or an institution. In this way the texts become the unconscious victims of ideological oppression. Indeed, most of the time scholars feed their new theoretical and methodological positions into the text to produce the desired meaning as it appears in their interpretation. It happens much the same way as, in psychoanalysis, the analyst's beliefs and procedures modify the narrative of the person who is being analyzed.<sup>28</sup> In the context of present discussion, the most significant trace of evidence regarding Guru Arjan's death has become the victim of a nationalist /imperialist agenda through which it is treated just as an 'aside' in the context of the overall thrust of Sirhindi's long letter.

It is naïve to seek from the public statements of religious or political leaders about their involvement in particular conspiracies. They simply do not disclose these private details. It is for the historians to unmask their hidden motives by reconstructing the complex historical context from the bits and pieces of available evidence. Rather than carefully examining the entire contemporary and near-contemporary evidence to arrive at a meaningful framework, both Fenech and Indu Banga fall into the precarious trap of pedestrian technicalities of Sirhindi's letter (such as 'passive voice in Persian' or 'in passing' [*darin hal*]!). While Fenech uses Persian phrases from the *Jahangirnama* to claim that Jahangir did not consider Guru Arjan as a spiritual leader, Indu Banga, by contrast, interprets that Sirhindi's 'intensely spiteful phrases' for Guru Arjan "may actually suggest that his death had eliminated the most pre-eminent among the non-Muslim religious leaders."<sup>29</sup> She continues: "Thus, despite himself, Sirhindi gives the impression that the fifth Guru [w]as important as much for his general popularity and widespread influence as for an independent stance."<sup>30</sup> Are there two different cultural modes of reading the similar Persian phrases by Western and Indian scholars? Who is right and who is wrong? Or, are both using their readings to serve their own particular interests?

Indu Banga's approach may appear to be amusing to some readers but it does not offer any alternative historical perspective on Guru Arjan's martyrdom.<sup>31</sup> She quotes half part of my sentence to make the following observation with sarcasm: "Interestingly, by the time Pashaura Singh concludes this discussion, even he cannot make up his mind, and he ends by saying: 'it is not quite clear how instrumental Sheikh (*sic.*) Ahmad Sirhindi may have been in Guru Arjan's execution'!"<sup>32</sup> This is certainly not what I am claiming here as my position on this issue. The readers can look at the complete sentence and make up their own mind

about what I am actually saying: “It is not quite clear how instrumental Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi may have been in Guru Arjan’s execution; but less one credits him with direct involvement, the more one is left regarding him as formulating theologically the direction in which his society and Mughal officials were moving fast anyway.”<sup>33</sup> The misrepresentation of my position can hardly be expected of a senior historian. Nevertheless, I am grateful to her for taking time to do the critique of my work and providing some useful feedback for my consideration on agrarian resistance. Although I do not agree with most of her criticisms (because my approach to look at a cross-cultural model of peasantry is quite different from her strictly narrow regional focus), I will certainly revisit my arguments in some fashion in a future study.

My academic position on Guru Arjan’s martyrdom remains the same that I stated in the conclusion of my book. The comprehensive examination of the contemporary and near-contemporary sources clearly indicates that Guru Arjan was put to death with tortures according to the Mongol tribal law of Yasa by the orders of Emperor Jahangir. Although the crowning cause of capital punishment has been presented as Guru Arjan’s alleged blessings to the rebel Prince Khusrau, there were other urgent religious, socio-cultural, and economic factors that contributed in the final judgment of the absolute monarch. These major factors were as follows: Naqshbandi reaction against Akbar’s policy of religious pluralism and formulating new theological direction for the new emperor and the Mughal officials, the conversion of Muslims to Sikh faith, an extensive Jat allegiance to the Panth, the growing strength of the Sikh movement, and the emergence of Ramdasapur as an autonomous ‘power center’. Guru Arjan enjoyed high spiritual reputation among the Sufis and Muslim dervishes, a reputation that encouraged Prince Khusrau to seek his blessings. He had also visited Shaikh Nizam Thanessari for blessings before he came to Guru Arjan. Why did the emperor not give him capital punishment? Surely, there were other pressing concerns than the simple act of ‘blessing’ that has been blown out of proportion by the scholars. The Mughal administrators of Lahore who had been carefully monitoring the Sikh movement for a number of years found their opportunity to finally act against the Guru. They moved swiftly to eliminate Guru Arjan and cripple the rapidly-growing Sikh movement. Through their machinations they purposefully kept the Guru’s execution from public view in an attempt to absolve the state by subverting the understanding of the Sikh community.

The contemporary Sikh account of Bhai Gurdas was principally focused on the last will of the Guru, rather than on the circumstances that were responsible for his arrest by the Mughal authorities. His stony silence about the main causes of Guru Arjan’s death was not due to the loss of memory but a conscious attempt to bring the Panth out of its

traumatized-state with the help of the Guru's final spirited message. He was fully cognizant of Mughal machinations and chose to say little against them in order to ensure that the Sikh Panth would continue to thrive in the light of this most horrific execution. The process of "forgetting" became, in a sense, the enlarged and refocused alternative. In fact, historians have now acknowledged that "forgetting" is not simply a process of disappearance, but that it is enhanced and nuanced by new conditions that have the power to harm, even kill.<sup>34</sup> In Bhai Gurdas's estimation what he presented was more important for the survival of Sikhism than what he consciously omitted. He placed a reconstruction on the death of Guru Arjan in the ideal of supreme 'sacrifice'. By doing so he presented his life and death as that of a 'hero', which changed the subsequent history of the Sikh Panth. It is for the historians to decode Bhai Gurdas's 'silence' (or 'cowardice'?<sup>35</sup>). The Sikhs who perform and listen to Bhai Gurdas's stanza in devotional singing (*kirtan*) experience the deeper layers of its meaning in congregational worship.

The later Sikh narratives about Guru Arjan's execution were shaped on the basis of collective memory of different groups within the Sikh Panth. Motivated by shared interest in the past, groups derive roughly consensual group memories from individual memories. Groups shape and reshape these memories inter-subjectively through discourse and may communicate versions to successive generations.<sup>36</sup> As group interests change, so can the narratives that reflect them. In other words, group memories vary according to specific strategies of authorization, verification, and transmission that are deliberately adopted to express particular interests.<sup>37</sup> Obviously, written documents emerge from the 'struggle of memory against forgetting'. Most instructively, even though the authors of various Sikh narratives were single individuals, they represented the particular interest of their groups within the Sikh Panth. It is important that we keep this point in mind in our analysis. For instance, Sarup Das Bhalla, the author of *Mahima Prakash* (1776), represented the interests of all the descendants of the Gurus because of their distinguished origins. He was prompted by the urgency of the new situation in which the discourse of power politics was at work. Sikhs were rapidly gaining political ascendancy in the context of late 18<sup>th</sup> century Punjab. For him it was the need of the time to start a process of renegotiation in power relationships within the Panth.<sup>38</sup> His narrative therefore reflected the combined strategies of different groups of the Gurus' descendants, deliberately adopted to express their particular interests. According to his narrative on Guru Arjan's execution, Emperor Jahangir did not want to do any harm to a saintly figure (*fakar*), but due to the wicked Khatri Chandu Sahi's intrigues he took 200,000 rupees from him and handed the Guru over to him. It was Chandu who was ultimately responsible for torturing the Guru to death. The emperor is

completely exonerated in this narrative. The seductive power of this narrative was so great that it became the standard narrative in the later Sikh chronicles.

Kesar Singh Chhibbar of *Bansavali-nama* (1769) was writing from the perspective of Chhibbar Brahmins, whose ancestors were closely associated with the Gurus. He believed that only Brahmin Sikhs were entitled to receive state charity, and that was the main reason why he felt unhappy about the prevailing situation in which their claims were being ignored by the Sikh rulers. He never missed an opportunity to traduce the Khatri and Muslims who were associated with the Sikh administration. In his view, power and piety did not go together. The major theme of Kesar Singh's narrative is focused upon the rivalry of Guru Arjan's elder brother Prithi Chand, who had coveted the office of the Guru. In his view, the ongoing family feud was the main reason behind Guru Arjan's execution at the hands of Mughal authorities. He states that the combined machinations of Prithi Chand and the vicious Sahi Khatri resulted in the fifth Guru's death. He draws heavily from *Puranic* mythology to interpret Guru Arjan's death by reference to the laws of karma. Accordingly, Guru Arjan was previously the famous Arjuna of the Pandva dynasty of the *Mahabharata* and Prithi Chand the reincarnation of a rabbit (*sassa*) that Arjuna had inadvertently killed. The execution of the fifth Guru is, therefore, understood as the rabbit's karmic retribution for his earlier, accidental death.<sup>39</sup> However, the author's tone becomes rather spiteful when he says that "there was no Sikh who could exact vengeance from the Muslims (*turks*) [for the heinous deed of killing Guru Arjan],"<sup>40</sup> underlining the fact that ultimately the Mughal authorities were to be held responsible for the Guru's death.

In contrast to the powerful standard Sikh narrative, Rattan Singh Bhangu's *Panth Prakash* (1841) offers a radical new 'voice' about the fifth Guru's execution. He exposed the secrecy of Emperor Jahangir as follows: "The fourth Mughal emperor was Jahangir who became the 'prisoner' of Muslim clerks and jurists (*chautha shah bhaio jahangir//mullan qazi mil bhaio asir//*). He committed a heinous deceitful act against Guru Arjan [but absolved himself] by shifting the blame on the head [/shoulders] of a Khatri [Chandu Shah]" (*un guru arjan siun khot kamai//sou burai sir khatri lai//*).<sup>41</sup> Rattan Singh Bhangu belonged to the reputed Khalsa families of eighteenth-century Punjab. He was the son of Rai Singh, grandson of Mahtab Singh Mirankot (who was one of the assassins of Massa Ranghar) and maternal grandson of Shyam Singh Karoria. In 1809 he was invited to tell the story of the rise of the Sikhs to the Englishman Captain Murray in Ludhiana. His account in Braj/Punjabi was subsequently issued in 1841 under the title of *Panth Prakash*, a work which is strongly focused on the theme of the creation of the Khalsa and its destiny to rule. He was writing in the historical context of early

decades of nineteenth century when the British designs of incursion into the Punjab were becoming apparent. Accordingly, all who acknowledge the Khalsa discipline (*rahit*) must maintain the unity of the Panth and be prepared to assert their fundamental right to rule in their homeland. Most instructively, Bhangu's narrative on Guru Arjan's execution represented a relatively muted 'voice' of the rural population of the Sikh Panth. It exposed the deceptive framework of Mughal authorities who shifted the blame for the Guru's execution from Emperor Jahangir to the Guru's own traditional enemy Chandu Shah.

In sum, different groups within the Sikh Panth shaped and reshaped group memories through inter-subjective discourse on Guru Arjan's execution and communicated their versions to successive generations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A major shift in scholarly works came only when the Sikhs became aware of the actual contents of Jahangir's memoirs in the early decades of twentieth century. In particular, the knowledge of Shaikh Ahamad Sirhindi's letters in Persian (*maktubat*) prompted the process of re-interpretation of Guru Arjan's execution in the works of Ganda Singh (*Guru Arjan's Martyrdom: Re-interpreted*, 1969) and Kapur Singh,<sup>42</sup> both of them offering diametrically opposed views on the reasons behind the Guru's execution.<sup>43</sup> In a more recent work in Punjabi language, *Sach di Siasat: Guru Arjan Dev di Shahidi bare ikk Samvad* ("Politics of Truth: A Dialogue on the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev"), the martyrdom of Guru Arjan has become a non-zero-sum game of multiple players, a subject of dramatic construction.<sup>44</sup> Not surprisingly, there are multiple voices contributing to the discourse on collective memory and 'critical histories' of Guru Arjan's execution in Mughal custody.

In this final section, I would like to turn my attention to the usage of terminology and other related issues. The Punjabi term *kurbani* (via Arabic *qurbani*, 'sacrifice') is normally understood as an act of 'a giving up, or giving of' the gift of one's life to and for protecting righteousness (*dharam*) or nation.<sup>45</sup> In the early Sikh tradition the phrase *sis laggana* or *sis dena* ('offering of a head') was used for an act of 'sacrifice' in defense of faith. The most popular scriptural passage in this regard is Guru Nanak's *salok* ('verse'): "If you want to play the game of love, step into my lane with your head on the palm of your hand. Place your feet on this path and give your head without any fear or grumbling."<sup>46</sup> Clearly, to place one's 'head on the palm' symbolizes an act of self-sacrifice on the path of love. Thus loving devotion in the Sikh tradition is a matter of life and death where to love ultimately means to sacrifice one's life. Guru Tegh Bahadur's supreme sacrifice was thus described in the Dasam Granth that 'he gave his head but not his resolve' (*sis dia par sirar na dia*) to defend the freedom of faith. In the narrative of Kesar Singh Chhibbar's *Bansavali-nama* (1769) Guru Arjan is said to have explicitly

stated in the verse (V: 131): “Our head will be given in sacrifice, and this moment has come as certainty” (*asada laggega sisu ihu nischa hai aia*). The same phrase *sis dena* for sacrifice was adopted in the standard Sikh Prayer (*Ardas*): “Think of the sacrifices of those Singhs and Singhanis who gave their heads for righteousness...” (*jinhan singhan singhanian ne dharam het sis ditte...*). Throughout history the Sikh tradition has consistently understood the meaning of ‘giving one’s head’ to be a supreme act of self-sacrifice.

Again, in Guru Nanak’s view the notion of honor and self-respect (*pati*) is highly prized in life and at the time of death. For him, a heroic death must be based upon the true ‘honor’ obtained before the divine court of Akal Purakh (‘Timeless One’, God): “Blessed is the death of heroic men if their dying is approved of [by the immortal Lord]. Only those men may be called heroes who obtain true honor before the divine Court.”<sup>47</sup> They who had practiced the discipline of meditation on the divine Name (*nam simaran*) during their lifetime receive true honor at the final moment of death. In fact, there are two levels of death, one false and one true. Forgetting the divine Name is the only death from the perspective of the Guru’s teachings: “If I repeat the Name I live; if I forget it, I die. Repeating the Name of the True One is hard, but if one hungers for it and partakes of it all sadness goes.”<sup>48</sup> Forgetting the divine Name produces spiritual death, only those who ‘remember’ the divine Name are truly alive. There is no violence apart from the separation from Akal Purakh, and those who forget the divine Name have to suffer the pain of physical death repeatedly.

For Guru Arjan, true life is found only in the divine Name: “Finding the blessed Name, Nanak, I am truly alive and my body and mind bloom in joyous bliss.”<sup>49</sup> The most frequent self-reference in his works is not as a Guru, but as a servant (*sevak*) of God or even as a slave to God’s slaves (*dasani das*). Note the following striking autobiographical hymn in the *Maru* raga:

[The servant] has not brought anything other than the Lord to mind, such things as pride, attachment, avarice or evil propensities. Trading in the jewels of the divine Name and other virtues, he has carried such merchandize with him in life. (1) The love of God’s servant has remained constant till the last. While living, he has served the divine Sovereign (*Sahib*); at the time of departure he has kept him in mind. (1) *Refrain*. The servant has not turned away his face from the command that came from the Lord. Maintaining ‘blissful equanimity’ (*sahaj anand*) in the heart, he has always rushed to carry out the divine command. (2) In

obeying the Lord's command, the servant has felt joy even in hunger, rising above the discrimination of sorrow and joy. He has obeyed with great reverence each and every command of the Lord. (3) As the Lord showered his merciful grace on the servant, his life in this world and the next was exalted. Blessed and fruitful is the coming into the world of such a servant, Nanak, who has recognized the divine Sovereign. (4) (M5, *Maru* 5, AG, 1000).

This portrayal of an 'ideal servant' fits very well in the life of Guru Arjan himself. In fact, this *Maru* hymn provides us with the conceptual framework in which his life and death may be seen. Having brought his life into complete harmony with the divine will, order and command (*hukam*), the 'ideal servant' simultaneously achieves identification with the love of humanity and Akal Purakh. In other words, it is a creative quest of the self for realizing one's authentic nature on its journey from finite to infinite. This is the mystical dimension of Sikh experience in which one transcends the duality of joys and sorrows, and transmutes all suffering into 'blissful equanimity' (*sahaj anand*). This is the ultimate goal of all spiritual quest based on the discipline of meditation on the divine Name.

When Sikhs celebrate the anniversary of Guru Arjan's execution they recite his *Maru* hymn in devotional singing and distribute a cool drink of milk and water to everyone. The soothing drink honors the agony the fifth Guru endured for the sake of their faith. How, why and when did this formal ritual begin? Fenech has not paid any attention to uncover the meaning of this most significant practice based upon the collective memory of the Sikh Panth. It is instructive to note that religious communities create memory through the practice of rituals and symbols. In particular, rituals and recitals could bridge the gap between the past and the present where recitals of the past events are not just matters of intellectual exercises but of an invocation and an evocation in which historical remembrances produce subjectivities and create mentalities.<sup>50</sup> In the context of present discussion, ritual performance of a cool drink creates re-actualization of the past drawing the Sikhs closer to the event of Guru Arjan's execution being commemorated.

Moreover, Fenech's work is problematic since he has superimposed Semitic categories on the Sikh tradition to understand the notion of 'martyrdom' purely from Protestant and Islamic frameworks. In postmodern critique scholars have realized the futility of this exercise, in particular the usage of the word 'martyrdom' for the selfless actions of the Sikh Gurus who practically demonstrated the power of love and the acceptance of the will of God.<sup>51</sup> Even if the Arabic word *shahid* has



entered into Sikh lexicon (like many other key words of Persian origin) it has a distinctively different meaning in each new context of its usage. To limit the phenomenon of ‘martyrdom’ solely to the history of its usage does great violence to the proper understanding of the Sikh tradition, having its own terminology actually employed for expressing an act of self-sacrifice for the defense of faith.

In sum, Fenech does accept that “McLeod interprets ideas of martyrdom through ostensibly Semitic lens, achieving a definition which is quite similar to those we find in Judaic, Christian, and Muslim sources: ‘a conceptual system of posthumous recognition and anticipated reward’ a phrase I used in an earlier article underscoring in part the Sikh martyrological debt to Arabic and Islam” (p. 82). Although Fenech himself has been employing the same framework, he is beginning to take into account the Indic definition of self-sacrifice from recent researches. One day he might understand that Sikhs are not concerned about ‘a conceptual system of posthumous recognition and anticipated reward’. For them, a single verse of Guru Nanak can provide justification to lay down their lives for the sake of truth and justice. Therefore, an act of self-sacrifice is performed with the divine Name on the lips in accordance with the divine will. This is what Guru Arjan did to put his ‘seal’<sup>52</sup> on the establishment of the ‘rule of justice and humility’ (*halemi raj*) with the gift of his life.

## Notes

I am grateful to the useful feedback provided by Professor Gurinder Singh Mann and Professor Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Pashaura Singh, *Life and Work of Guru Arjan: History, Memory, and Biography in the Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Louis E. Fenech, “Martyrdom and the Sikh Tradition,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 117, no. 4 (1997): 629.

<sup>4</sup> See his Foreword to my *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, p. x. In her review of my book, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh observes: “I find it significant that Professor Hew McLeod (who doubted the martyrdom in his *Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Oxford, 1975, p. 3) now agrees with Pashaura Singh. In his forward to his book, McLeod acknowledges and honors the Guru “who was cruelly executed while being held by the

Mughal authorities in Lahore.” See *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture and Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (December 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Wheeler M. Thackston, trans. and ed., *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 53. Jahangir’s predisposition against popularly venerated religious figures has been noted by J.F. Richards in his *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), p. 97. For Jahangir’s hostility towards the Jains, see Ellison B. Findly, “Jahangir’s Vow of Non-Violence,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 117 (1987): 245-56.

<sup>6</sup> *The Jahangirnama*, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> For detailed analysis of Bhai Gurdas’s *Var* 24:23, see my *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, pp. 39-41.

<sup>8</sup> Shireen Moosvi has translated the original Persian text of *Jahangirnama* about Guru Arjan in J.S. Grewal & Irfan Habib, eds., *Sikh History from Persian Sources* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), p. 57. See her explanation of punishment according to Mongol Law, p. 57, n. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato, and Jen Webb, eds., *Understanding Foucault* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), pp. 68-9.

<sup>10</sup> J.R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ganda Singh, *Guru Arjan’s Martyrdom: Re-interpreted* (Patiala: Guru Nanak’s Mission, 1969), p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> See my *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, p. 206.

<sup>13</sup> Louis E. Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: ‘Playing the Game of Love’* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 120.

<sup>14</sup> Bonnie C. Wade, *Imaging Sound: An Ethnomusicological Study of Music, Art, and Culture in Mughal India* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 162.

<sup>15</sup> Ahmad Sirhindi, *Maktubat-i Imam-i Rabbani* (Lucknow, 1889), letter 193.

<sup>16</sup> Yohanan Friedman, *Shaikh Ahmad Sirhandi: An Outline of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1966), p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*, p. 119.

<sup>18</sup> Thackston, trans., *The Jahangirnama*, p. 59.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. This is mentioned in the preface to *Jahangirnama* by Muhammad-Hadi.

<sup>20</sup> Friedmann, *Shaikh Ahmad Sirhandi*, pp. 83-5. For Jahangir’s description of “The Charlatan Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi” see *The Jahangirnama*, p. 304. Also see, p. 341: “On this date I summoned to my presence Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, who had spent a while in prison on

account of his pretentiousness and presumptuousness, and set him free. I also awarded him a robe of honor and a thousand rupees and gave him the choice of whether to leave or stay. “This chastisement has been a sufficient retribution for my soul,” he replied. “I will remain in your retinue.”

<sup>21</sup> Madanjit Kaur and Piar Singh, *Sikhism for Modern Man by Sirdar Kapur Singh* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1992), p. 45. Jahangir reconfirmed Shaykh Farid Bukhari’s title when he presented to him a jewel-studded sword and a jewel-studded ink pot and said: “We consider you the lord of the sword and the pen.” See *The Jahangirnama*, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> Father Pierre Du Jarric, *Akbar and the Jesuits* (trans. by C. H. Payne), p. 204. Cited in *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Thackston, trans., *The Jahangirnama*, p. 144.

<sup>24</sup> Sirhindi, *Maktubat-i Imam-i Rabbani*, I-iii, letter No. 193, pp. 95-6. Ganda Singh has produced the original and its translation in *Guru Arjun’s Martyrdom*, pp. 36-7.

<sup>25</sup> For details, see my *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, pp. 218-224. Also see Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s insightful analysis of the “Crystallization of Religious Communities in Mughal India” in *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague, Paris and New York: Mouton Publishers, 1981), pp. 177-196. Smith argues that the Sikh and Islamic processes of crystallization were parallel movements, which decisively intertwined at certain points. One such conspicuous moment was the execution of Guru Arjan in Lahore in 1606 by Jahangir. This happened shortly after a major step in Muslim process of consolidation took place, specifically Shaykh Farid Bukhari’s (i.e. Mir Murtaza Khan’s) success in diverting and then suppressing Khusrau’s bid for a more Akbar-like reign.

<sup>26</sup> Indu Banga, “Recent Studies on the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan: A Critique,” in Prithipal Singh Kapur and Mohinder Singh, eds., *Guru Arjan’s Contribution, Martyrdom and Legacy* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2009), p. 174.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> These two points have been adapted from Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 53-54.

<sup>29</sup> Banga, “Recent Studies,” p. 174.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> For instance, read Indu Banga’s general remark: “In fact, there may not be any contradiction between the emperor’s orders and the role of Prithi Chand, Chandu Shah and perhaps others. It was the convergence of different factors and forces at a particular historical juncture that resulted in the martyrdom of Guru Arjan.” *Ibid.*, 179. One can agree with her

comment to a certain extent, but one wonders why does she consciously omit Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi from her list of human actors?

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>33</sup> See my *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, pp. 223-4.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. xxiv.

<sup>35</sup> Last summer (July 2010) Amarjit Singh Grewal narrated to me his conversation with Professor J.S. Grewal about Bhai Gurdas's 'silence' about the causes of Guru Arjan's execution. In responding to the question why Bhai Gurdas did not write anything explicitly about it, J.S. Grewal replied in a typical Punjabi style: *oh dar gia hou* ('He might be frightened'). Amarjit Singh Grewal then asked him why he (J.S. Grewal) did not write about Bhai Gurdas's 'cowardice' in his writings. J.S. Grewal's response was again in the same humorous style: *mai bhi dar gia houn* ("I myself might have become afraid"). This is a simple way of putting it lightheartedly. There are, however, complex issues behind that historical situation that have escaped scholarly analysis. For instance, in 2006 Sikhs celebrated the major event of Guru Arjan's martyrdom in Lahore where they had invited the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shaukat Aziz, to participate in a special function. Dr. Darshan Singh of Chandigarh was one of the main speakers. He did not utter a single word against Jahangir or the Mughal authorities in his Punjabi speech. Why? Was he also afraid? Or, were the Sikhs more concerned with building good relationships with the Pakistani authorities keeping the current needs of the community in mind? Why are we then interpreting Bhai Gurdas's 'silence' as 'cowardice'?

<sup>36</sup> For details, see Peter Gottschalk, *Beyond Hindu and Muslim: Multiple Identity in Narratives in Village India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 5-6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> It is instructive to note that the author of *Mahima Prakash* does not mention the name of Prithi Chand as responsible for Guru Arjan's death in any way. Although Jiwan Mal (sixth in line from Prithi Chand) reestablished the lineage at the village of Guru Har Sahai (named after his son) in 1752, his grandson, Ajit Singh (d. 1813) worked out a close relationship with the Khalsa. Similarly, the exclusion of the Sodhi family of Kartarpur (Dhirmalias) from the Panth was lifted in the second half of the eighteenth century. It was Vadbhag Singh who was able to win this reprieve with the help of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Indeed, Sarup Das Bhalla was fully aware of these renegotiations with the Khalsa during his time.

<sup>39</sup> Piara Singh Padam, ed., *Bansavalinama Dasan Patishahian Ka* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1997), Verses 103-131, pp. 82-4. Also see Louis E. Fenech, "Martyrdom and the Execution of Guru Arjan in Early Sikh Sources," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 121, No. 1 (January-March, 2001): 26, and J.S. Grewal, *Sikh Ideology, Polity and Social Order* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1996), p. 143.

<sup>40</sup> Padam, *Bansavalinama*, 5: 139, p. 85

<sup>41</sup> Jit Singh Seetal, ed., *Sri Guru Panth Parkash: Krit (Authored by) Bhai Ratan Singh Bhangu, Shahid* (Amritsar: Sikh Itihas Research Board, S.G.P.C., 1984), p. 366.

<sup>42</sup> See Madanjit Kaur & Piar Singh, eds., *Selected Works of Sirdar Kapur Singh: Guru Arjan and His Sukhmani* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> For the discussion of their views, see my *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, pp. 208-11.

<sup>44</sup> Amarjit Singh Grewal, *Sach di Saiast: Guru Arjan Dev di Shahidi bare ikk Samvad* (Ludhiana, Punjabi Bhavan: Chetna Prakashan, 2009). This work is a compilation of a conversation among the leftist scholars, Punjabi literary critics, dramatists, and poets. Two years before this publication Amarjit Singh Grewal wrote to me as follows: "Dear Dr. Pashaura Singh: After going through your book *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, especially the chapter on martyrdom, I am excited to congratulate you for doing such a work. With the involvement of more than two players, the martyrdom of Guru Arjan does not remain a matter of historical (dialectical) construction, but becomes a non-zero-sum game of multiple players, a subject of dramatic construction. You have done it. I will be writing about it." (Personal communication, February 23, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> See C. Shackle, *A Guru Nanak Glossary* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1995 [SOAS 1981]), p. 85: "*kurabanu* (-i, -o), sacrifice, offering." Also see Ivan Strenski's discussion of the term 'sacrifice' in his "Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim Human Bombers" in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 15:3 (2003): 8.

<sup>46</sup> M1, *Salok Varan Te Vadhik* 20, AG, p. 1412.

<sup>47</sup> M1, *Vadahansu Alahanian* 2, AG, pp. 579-80.

<sup>48</sup> M1, *Asa* 3, AG, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> M5, *Salok*, AG, p. 1429.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996 [1982]), p. 44.

<sup>51</sup> Pal Ahluwalia, "The politics of intimacy: (re)thinking 1984," *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*, Volume 6, No. 2 (December 2010): 115: "The actions the Sikh Gurus took were not a form of resignation. Their conundrum was akin likely to Abraham's test of faith. They demonstrated the importance of accepting the will of God and the

power of love. Above all, their actions, albeit in response to a hostile state that refused to allow its citizens to freely practice their religion, were not merely about politics. Their actions were not about recognition or granting of a certain status of martyr. Rather, they paved a path that practically demonstrated the power of love and the acceptance of the will of God.”

<sup>52</sup> The term comes from J.S. Grewal’s article, “Guru Arjan Dev’s Life, Martyrdom and Legacy,” in Kapur and Singh, eds., *Guru Arjan’s Contribution, Martyrdom and Legacy*, p. 34: “Like Ramdaspur, the Harimandar and Ramdas Sarovar, the Granth is the expression of God’s grace and the means of advancing the dispensation of Guru Nanak for the redemption of humankind. This is the *halemi raj* that was established through Divine Ordinance. Guru Arjan put his seal on it with his life.”